

## Finding Ourselves in the Palm Sunday Parade

*Matthew 8:27-37*

March 13, 2005

[This was done as a dramatic monologue loosely based on Thornton Wilder's play – *Our Town*.]

This play is called “Our Town.” It was scripted by Yahweh but is enacted by humans, each acting out his or her own part. Each has total freedom, but each often acts in ways that are very, very predictable. In this play I will invite you to use your imagination. If you do, you see Jesus, and his disciples. You will see crowds waving palms, and Jewish religious leaders, and Roman soldiers and many others too numerous to mention.

The name of our town is “the city of peace” - That's pronounced as (je – ru' – sa – lem) if you want to say it in Hebrew. Latitude 31 degrees, 47 minutes N, longitude 35 degrees, 13 minutes E. This is a one act play that shows a portion of one day in our town. It happens during the eighteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar. For your calendar today that could be March 20, 30 A.D.

Our town has been here for at least a thousand years, some historians say it has been here two thousand or maybe even three thousand years. We are the largest city between Alexandria down in Egypt and Damascus up in Syria. Our town is very old; it is also very new.

Allow me to set the stage. Over here, high on this hill we have the Temple Mount (I'll say more about that later). Over there to the East, across the Kidron Valley, and across the crest of the Mount of Olives, lie the villages of Bethany and Bethphage. That is where our parade will be starting. The parade will go down in the Kidron Valley and then enter the city over here, in lower Jerusalem. After proceeding through the streets, it will finally end here at the Temple.

Over here we have some pilgrims. You don't have to image these pilgrims. You can see them. They are here and we'll be hearing from them later in the morning. Yes, and behind these pilgrims, up there in Upper Jerusalem stands the palace of King Herod and the homes of the wealthy and Pilate's Judgment Hall. You will not need to remember that for today . . . I just thought you might want to know.

Yes, and now back to the temple . . . Is it the second temple or the third? That's a good question. Perhaps we should call it the revised and expanded edition of the second temple. The first was built by King Solomon almost a thousand years ago. It lasted about four hundred years before it was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar. On that occasion many of the inhabitants of our town were taken off as captives to Babylon. After our people came back from that exile, they built the second temple. That was about five hundred years ago.

Then about forty years ago, King Herod began a major remodeling project. By Jewish religious law, he was not allowed to change the shape of the temple. What he did do was level the top of the mountain and enlarge the courtyards around the temple. He also used a thousand priests supervising ten thousand skilled workers. When he was done the temple courts had been extended to over thirty-five acres. He covered the temple with gold and with gleaming white marble. Was it beautiful? Here in our town we might be partial, but historians and architects tell us that you could look through all of Rome and Greece and Egypt and you would find nothing to match. We even have a proverb that says "He who has never seen the Temple, has never known beauty."

Let me give you just a few more details about the temple. In the inner temple is the Holy of Holies. That is the place where the high priest goes once a year to offer the sacrifice to God on behalf of the people. Outside there is a series of courts . . . the court of Israel (Israel men that is). Then there is the Court of the Women (of course that is Jewish women). Around these courtyards are the Court of the Gentiles.

Of course this is also the place where merchants sell their doves and sheep and cattle for the sacrifices. This is also the place where the money-changers set up their booths. What words come to mind to describe the Court of the Gentiles? I think of words like loud, dirt, profanity,



You are important to God and to us.  
Feel free to share your thoughts,  
your comments and your  
questions at:

[alane.miller@att.net](mailto:alane.miller@att.net)

confusion . . . I can't imagine trying to pray under those circumstances . . . but many do.

What's that? Can the Gentiles go into the inner courts? No. Absolutely not! Signs are posted in several languages at each of the gates. A rough translation would be "It is forbidden for any Gentile to enter this gate. If you do you will have only yourself to blame for your death which will most certainly occur." After our, here in our town we believe that you do have to have rules. So . . . that's the Temple and it's courtyards.

To the west, outside the city walls stands the hill of Golgotha. Nothing will happen there today. No one will see it, but the shadow of that hill and the crosses that will soon be raised on that hill loom large over today's events. Does anyone realize the horror that will happen there, in just a few short days? Anyone other than Jesus that is? Not really. They don't realize. They just don't realize!

Well, that's the setting of our town, now allow me to describe some of the people you will imagine in this play. There is of course Jesus. Jesus began his public ministry about three years ago. He was baptized by John down in the Jordan River. He has been quite a topic of conversation ever since. Of course his miracles would get anyone's attention. But it was more than the miracles, his teaching is blunt, bold and direct. Many think that his presence evokes the very presence of God. Today, Jesus will be at the center of attention.

Along with Jesus will be his disciples – the twelve men who Jesus called to be with him. They have lived with him, they have traveled with him for the last three years. There are other disciples who will be here today. But it is the twelve who have been the closest to him.

Today in our play we will also have the religious leaders – Caiaphas, the high priest and Ananias his father-in-law, who many consider to be the real power behind the high priest. They will be joined by their colleagues, the other Sadducees whose decisions govern the life and thought of the Jewish people.

We also have in our town the Roman soldiers. These soldiers physically demonstrate the power and the authority of Rome. They are stationed in the Fortress Antonia, that's just over there, just beside the temple courts. They are here to keep the peace. Some wonder if peace is really peace when demanded by the edge of a Roman sword.

Then we have the pilgrims – They are the ones who will make this parade really memorable. For this is Passover. It is the time when Jewish pilgrims will come to our town from all over the known world. They come to remember and to celebrate God's great act of deliverance as he lead our people out of the land of Egypt and away from the tyranny of Pharaoh. In this week our town will swell from it's normal size of about 30,000 to to almost 200,000 people. They are the ones who come to celebrate what God has done in the past and who will yearn to see God's saving hand yet again.

Finally we have the foreigners – the *goyim*. They are the outsiders. As in any large town there are people here who came from somewhere else. They are not sons of Abraham. Perhaps they came as merchants, or as slaves, or as craftsmen. They are here. Some are here and would like to be somewhere else. Some are here because they have come to believe that Yahweh, the God of Israel is in fact the God of the world. Some of them have been circumcised. They keep the dietary rules and regulations observed by the Jews and are considered full participants in God's family. (Perhaps not completely by all, but they are in.)

We have many other *goyim*. Yes, they believe in Yahweh but are not yet ready to fully observe the Jewish customs. They too come to the temple to worship. But they must remain outside the gates. Their place is with the animals and the money changers. Yes, it's loud. Yes, they must listen to the cries and the curses of of the stock merchants and the money traders. But that's where they belong.

As I already said, this is Passover week. Today starts the week.. It's just after noon. The crowds are beginning to assemble for the evening sacrifices. And there . . . there over the ridge of the Mount of Olives comes Jesus. He is riding on a donkey. And he is surrounded by his disciples and a band of pilgrims. They are too far away to understand anything that they are saying yet. But the crowd just keeps growing growing. They are waving palm branches.

They are throwing the garments in the road in front of the donkey to provide a path over which Jesus can ride.

They are making their way down the slopes of the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley. They are entering the gates of the lower city.

Do you hear the sound of the crowd? Yes, Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. They are shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is the coming King.”

They are getting closer. Their cries are getting louder.

[Here the choir sang the morning anthem *Sing Hosanna*, by Chaplin.]

What a joyful, awesome moment. It was just perfect. I'm sure many wanted to freeze that moment. At least the disciples and the pilgrims did. Let's just crown Jesus king. Let's just enjoy this moment forever.

Of course life does not work that way. For not everyone is cheering. The religious leaders are embarrassed. Who does this guy think he is? The Roman soldiers are alert . . . wary. They know that such demonstrations can get out of hand. They will act decisively if necessary to keep the peace.

Do you know what happened next? Jesus went to the temple. He went to the outside court . . . to the court of the Gentiles. He picked up some scraps of cord and braided a rope. He began to drive out the merchants and the livestock. He upset the tables of the money-changers. It was some dust-up. As he did Jesus quoted the words from the ancient prophet: *My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of thieves.*

So was Jesus just a trouble-maker? If the religious leaders were embarrassed before, now they were livid. This trouble-maker just sealed his own fate. He would die.

These cheering crowds don't know it yet, but just in just a few days some of these same people will be standing in Pilate's Judgment Hall demanding that Jesus be crucified. It makes you wonder about people doesn't it.

So what is the point of this story? Is it just to demonstrate the fickleness of people? Or is there a place in this story where we might find ourselves? So where are we? Who are we?

Are we the pilgrims . . . looking for someone who will fulfill our agenda. We will follow you as our leader as long as you go where we want you to go and do what we want you to do?

Are we the disciples . . . totally committed but totally clueless? We think we will follow Jesus to the ends of the earth, but we don't know, we really don't know what we will do . . . or when we will cut and run?

Are we the religious leaders – desperately hanging onto what we've got and suspicious of anyone who would challenge our power or prestige.

Are we the Roman soldiers – the law and order types. We might not agree with all the rules, but you got to have order. Hey maybe we don't agree with every order we might get, but we will keep the peace (and we will do it Rome's way).

Are we the outsiders, the foreigners? We sense that there is more to life than what we have yet to experience, but we find it difficult to get past the outside gate because of ancient rules that really don't seem to mean anything to us today?

So were are we in that Palm Sunday parade?